



Hiring for Heart

By Todd A. Shetter, COO of ActivCare Living, Inc.

Regardless if you are hiring a private duty caregiver to assist the family with a loved one at home 20 hours a week or hiring a full staff of caregivers and nurses for a newly constructed Memory Care community for 60 residents, there is nothing more important than 'heart'.

Caring for those with dementia and related memory loss issues takes special skills and talents that are not taught in a classroom or learned from a book. Compassion, kindness and positive attributes are the most important characteristic to me when we are hiring new hands on staff members.

The technical attributes of quality memory care can be taught. Over the past 25 years, we have developed an Alzheimer's Academy with more than twelve modules that address everything from aggressive behavior to proper toileting skills to re-directing repetitive questions. We have experienced a better outcome with training to these unique skills than re-training certified nursing aides who are trained how to care for those in nursing homes.

Direct hands-on care for those with Alzheimer's and related dementias is hard work. Caregivers who are not prepared, trained and in the right frame of mind will not succeed and will certainly not enjoy their job. If we provide comprehensive training correctly and consistently our best caregivers will also be the most confident and happiest employees. They will know their job, feel confident in their abilities and truly understand what to expect and how to react to the issues they face every day as a dementia caregiver.

The frustration, I believe, experienced by many family caregivers at home is rooted in the ever changing nature of the disease progression and the effect on their loved one's behavior, many times within the same day. If a trained and prepared caregiver knows that behavior may begin to change as the sun goes down, known as Sundowners, then they will be prepared when agitation and wandering ramps up every day at 4 pm.

Knowledge is power and having informed expectations can serve to relieve the tension and allow caregivers to respond with patience and appropriate responses.

Every job takes a certain amount of specialized training. Caring for a senior who has lost judgment, memory and inhibitions takes special training, but more importantly a special individual who really cares. Unfortunately, there are no fail-safe tests to gauge or measure 'heart'.

Hiring for heart takes practice. I have learned some tricks over the years and I'm happy to share.

Getting to Know You. During an interview, I want to know what caregivers are passionate about, how do they spend their time off, what are their hobbies and why do they want to take on this difficult job. I don't believe you can fake compassion and passion. I ask them questions about their passions so I can see how they light up, how they smile and what their enthusiasm looks like when talking about things they truly love.

Getting to Know About You. When I ask them about caregiving, taking on the tough job of caring for those who have forgotten I want to see that compassion and measure it against our earlier discussion.

In your search, if you don't believe that potential caregivers want the job because they are genuinely caring individuals and have a 'heart' for it they are not the right person. There are many jobs out there where they can make more money and be better suited for if they are not "in it" because of heart.

About ActivCare

ActivCare Living develops and manages communities designed to enhance the lives of those with memory loss. Whether in the early or late stages of memory loss, ActivCare's purpose-built communities, propriety programs, experienced staff and compassionate care offer a new life to affected individuals and hope to their families. For more information about ActivCare Living and its communities, please contact 858.565.4424 or visit activcareliving.com.